

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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P R 181059Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2236

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 23241

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV PINT TH

SUBJECT: FIELD MARSHALL PRAPHAT'S RETURN

REF: A) BANGKOK 23140

SUMMARY: WHEREABOUTS OF FIELD MARSHAL PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIAN STILL UNKNOWN. GOVERNMENT ADMITS HE IS IN THAILAND. STUDENT ACTIVISTS GIVE GOVERNMENT 48 HOURS TO ARREST PRAPHAT AND THOSE THAT ENGINEERED HIS RETURN. CONFLICTING STATEMENTS BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CAUSE CONFUSION. UNLESS PRAPHAT FOUND QUICKLY AND PERSUADED TO LEAVE, GOVERNMENT MAY FIND ITSELF IN MIDDLE OF CONFRONTATION WITH STUDENT ACTIVISTS AND ANTI-DICTATORSHIP SUPPORTERS. IN ANY EVENT LEADERSHIP IMAGE OF PRESENT GOVERNMENT FURTHER TARNISHED. END OF SUMMARY.

1. THE WHEREABOUTS OF PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIAN ARE STILL UNKNOWN. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT HAS FINALLY ADMITTED THAT HE DID RETURN TO THAILAND ON AUGUST 15. SEARCHES BY THE MILITARY AND THE POLICE OF SUSPECTED HIDEAWAYS HAVE TO DATE BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL.

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2. AS REPORTED IN REF A ABOUT 10,000 PERSONS, MOSTLY STUDENTS, ATTENDED THE NATIONAL STUDENT COUNCIL OF THAILAND (NSCT) ORGANIZED RALLY AT SANAM LUANG ON AUGUST 17. THE RALLY ENDED AFTER THE NSCT LEADERS ANNOUNCED THAT THE NSCT AND ALL STUDENT ACTIVIST GROUPS LAST NIGHT HAD SET A 48-HOUR DEADLINE FOR THE SENI GOVT TO ARREST PRAPHAT AND THOSE THAT ASSISTED HIS RETURN TO THAILAND. THEY SCHEDULED ANOTHER RALLY FOR AUGUST 19 AND PROMISED MASSIVE DEMONSTRATIONS IF THEIR DEMANDS WERE NOT MET. THEY MADE THIS ANNOUNCEMENT AFTER MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER.

3. THE LABOR COUNCIL ANNOUNCED ITS OPPOSITION TO THE RETURN OF PRAPHAT AND APPEALED TO THOSE IN POWER NOT TO TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO STAGE A COUP. THEY WARNED THAT IF THERE IS A COUP ATTEMPT, THE LABOR UNIONS WILL TELL THEIR WORKERS TO WALK OFF THEIR JOBS TO OPPOSE THE ATTEMPT.

4. THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADMISSION CAME AFTER TWO DAYS OF CONFUSION CAUSED BY CONFLICTING STATEMENTS BY RTG OFFICIALS. IN THE MORNING AND EARLY AFTERNOON OF AUGUST 16 THE POLICE-DIRECTOR-GENERAL AND THE COMMANDER OF IMMIGRATION TOLD REPORTERS THAT PRAPHAT HAD RETURNED TO THAILAND THE EVENING OF AUGUST 15. LATER THAT AFTERNOON THE PRIME MINISTER CONFIRMED THIS REPORT AND SAID THAT THE POLICE SPECIAL BRANCH KNEW OF HIS WHEREABOUTS. AT 2200 HOURS, AFTER A SPECIAL CABINET MEETING, DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER SAMAK SUNTHORAWET ANNOUNCED ON TV AND RADIO THAT THERE WAS NO SUBSTANTIATED EVIDENCE TO PROVE PRAPHAT'S RETURN TO THAILAND.

HE ALSO SAID THAT INVESTIGATIONS OF THE RUMORS WERE CONTINUING AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD DEFINITELY TAKE LEGAL ACTION AGAINST HIM IF HE HAD RETURNED. HE ALSO WARNED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE DECISIVE ACTION AGAINST ANY GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO USED THE INCIDENT AS AN EXCUSE TO INSTIGATE PUBLIC DISTURBANCES. (SENI ALSO REVERSED HIS STAND LATER THAT EVENING.)

5. WHILE HIS WHEREABOUTS ARE STILL A MYSTERY, MANY BELIEVE THAT PRAPHAT IS WITH OLD MILITARY LOYALISTS SOMEWHERE IN THAILAND. THE IMMIGRATION POLICE TOLD THE RSO THAT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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SURREPTITIOUS ENTRY WAS WELL-PLANNED AND EXECUTED. THEY BELIEVE PRAPHAT WOULD NOT LEAVE EASILY LIKE PRIME MINISTER THANOM DID.

6. COMMENTS: THE AUGUST 17 NSCT RALLY WAS CARRIED THROUGH WITHOUT VIOLENCE AND WITHOUT THE INTENSE SENSE OF OUTRAGE WHICH PERMEATED PREVIOUS RALLIES. BUT THE INGREDIENTS FOR A CONFRONTATION, WHICH MIGHT LEAD TO VIOLENCE AND BLOODSHED,

STILL EXIST.

7. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF THIS INCIDENT, THE LEADERSHIP
IMAGE OF THE GOVERNMENT LEADERS HAS BEEN TARNISHED ONCE
AGAIN. THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE IN CONTROL
OF THE SITUATION. THE EASY ENTRY, THE APPARENT IGNORANCE
OF THE LEADERS AS TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF PRAPHAT, THE CON-
FLICTING STATEMENTS MADE BY HIGH OFFICIALS AND THEIR APPARANT
WAFFLING STATEMENTS ON WHAT THEY WILL DO IF AND WHEN THEY FIND
HIM, CALL INTO QUESTION PRIME MINISTER SENI'S DECISIVENESS
AND HIS ABILITY AND THAT OF HIS COLLEAGUES TO GOVERN THE
COUNTRY.
WHITEHOUSE

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